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ABSTRACT

Canadian government welfare agencies are taking Canadian Indian children from their parents in alarming numbers and endangering their cultural and social development. Most of the children are placed in non-native homes, resulting in identity crises leading to alcoholism and other social problems. This is a serious trend. The survival of Indian people as an entity is dependent upon the retention of Indian culture which is fostered only by the security of the Indian family. Education has in many ways alienated Indian people from their culture. After 300 years of formal education brought to Indians by Europeans we witness the following statistics: the rate of unemployment for adult males averages over 50%, going as high as 90% in some communities compared to the national average of 3%; the average income for many Indian families is well below the poverty line; mortality among young adults is 4 times that of the general population; and 1 out of every 3 Indians will die a violent or accidental death if current fatality trends continue. An historical review of the education of Indians presents the perspective shared by many Indian leaders today which expresses the failure of the system. The 1972 policy of "Indian Control of Indian Education" sets a new direction, one linked with social and economic mobility. (Author/AN)

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"Indian Children/Parents and Education"

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Indian Children/Parents and Education

On April 15-17, 1980, the Canadian Indian Lawyers' Association sponsored a workshop on Indian Child Welfare. The purpose of the conference was to discuss problems in the Indian child welfare system in Canada and to establish directions for corrective measures.

The conference revealed that:

(1) Government welfare agencies are taking Indian children from their parents in alarming numbers and endangering their cultural and social development. Four per cent of status Indian children are looked after by federal and provincial child welfare services compared to 1.35% for the entire Canadian population. Children under 15 make up 40% of the total status Indian population of 300,000.

(2) Most of the apprehended children are placed in non-native homes. Such placements were reported to result in identity crisis leading to alcholism and other social problems.

This is a very serious trend. The survival of Indian people as an entity is dependent upon the retention of Indian culture which is fostered only by the security of the Indian family.

Education has in many ways alienated Indian people from their culture. The result has been disastrous. After 300 years of formal education brought to Indians by Europeans we witness the following statistics:

(1) The rate of unemployment for adult males averages over 50%, going as high as 90% in some communities compared to the national average of 8%.

(2) The average income for ~~an~~ many Indian families is well below the poverty line ~~compared to the national average~~.

(3) Mortality among young adults is four times that of the general population.

(4) One out of every three Indians will die a violent or accidental death if current fatality trends continue.

An historical review of the education of Indians will present the perspective shared by many Indian leaders today which expresses the failure of the system. The 1972 policy of "Indian Control of Indian Education" designed by Indians sets a new direction in education. A direction which is believed to be linked with social and economic mobility.

Traditional Education

If we view education as a process of learning, education has been a part of the lives of the Indian people from time immemorial. Prior to the arrival of the European to this country, Indians provided their own form of education. The teaching was done by the family, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Each had a unique part to play in the development of the child.

The most important aspect of traditional Indian education was that of spiritual learning. "The Indian had the most spiritual civilization the world has ever known. His approach to all life and thought was spiritual."

Some of the teachings were:

... that there is one Great Spirit, the Creator, and Ruler of all things, to whom we are responsible.

... that our main purpose on earth is to consecrate our lives to the service of our people.

... that we are to keep the feasts, learn the dances, respect the taboos, and observe the customs of our tribes.

... that we are not to be greedy of great riches

... that we should worship daily and fast frequently

... that we might raise the quality of our being.

These were a few of the spiritual teachings of our forefathers.

Another aspect of traditional Indian education was that of behavioural learning. These teachings emphasized:

... pride, humbleness, truthfulness, bravery, cleanliness and kindness

... respect for the elderly

. . . respect for nature

. . . learning to share, to be co-operative

. . . learning to be silent at times. Silence was regarded as the cornerstone of character. As Chief Wabasha stated, "Guard your tongue in youth and in age you may mature a thought that will be of service to your people."

Traditional Indian education was inextricably linked to economics. Learning was for living -- for survival. Boys and girls were taught at an early age to utilize and cope with their environment. Independence and self-reliance were valued concepts of our forefathers. Boys and girls learned how to hunt, trap, fish and farm. They learned whatever livelihood their particular environment offered. Some basic learning for survival included:

. . . how to dress

. . . how to build temporary and permanent shelters

. . . how to cure certain illnesses

. . . how to prepare and preserve foods

. . . how to travel on land and water

This was the traditional education of our people. This was an education where the community was the classroom and its members, its teachers. Each adult was responsible for each child, to see that he learned all that he needed to live a good life.

What was the effect of this type of education provided to Indian children? It would appear to have been very positive and very revelant because:

. . . it addressed itself to the times

. . . it addressed itself to the total being

. . . it addressed itself to the total community

It held in high esteem, Indian culture, values and customs. This process cortributed to the positive development of the child's potential as an individual in a society and to the image he has of himself as an Indian.

Education Provided by Missionaries and the Federal Government

In the early 17th century, missionaries were brought over from Europe to establish schools for Indians. It was believed to be the best method of bringing civilization to the "Natives". The Roman Catholic Church was the first to get involved in educating Indians in the 1600's. The Protestant churches did not get involved until after the turn of the 19th century. Day or Mission schools were the first to be established. While the day school concept was largely abandoned in favour of boarding schools in the latter 1800's until the 1950's, a few day schools did continue to exist. Several were built during that time. The building of day schools on reserves accelerated after 1950. Today, approximately 40% of the Indian student population is in attendance in day schools on reserves.

Boarding Schools

Boarding schools were devised as a means of isolating the child from his parents and the influence of the reserve. The purpose for the boarding school concept is reflected in a statement made by an Inspector in the mid 1800's.

> "Little can be done with him. He can be taught to do a little at farming, and at stock raising, and to dress in a more civilized manner, but that is all. The child who goes to a day school learns little and what he learns is soon forgotten, while his tastes are fashioned at home, and his inherited aversion to toil is in no way combatted."

These schools were designed to provide a plain English education adapted to the working farmer and mechanic or the like. It was to make provision for the domestic and religious life of the Indian children.

Their operation was necessarily oppressive. Having first achieved the effect of separating the child from his parents for long periods of time, the student was subjected to a severe regimen of work. The boys were expected to clean the stables, mend broken machinery and work in the fields. In fact, by the "half-day plan", they were expected to spend as much time in this kind of manual labour as in school. The same was true of the Indian girl, who had to spend half her waking time scrubbing floors and doing other forms of housework. The boarding school was most notable for the incredibly high mortality rates amoung the students. At about the turn of the century, it was estimated that fifty percent of the children who passed through these schools did not live to benefit from the education they had received therein.

The government became involved in the education of Indians in the mid 1800's. The boarding schools became jointly operated by the church and government. The church's duty was to manage the school, contribute part of the operating cost, and most important to provide spiritual guidance to the children. The government was responsible for inspection, special rules and regulations as well as making financial grants. This type of education for Indians was practiced for over 300 years. The highest recorded number of such schools

in Canada was 80 in 1933. The enrollment in the schools varied anywhere from fifty or so to over 400 students of all ages.

Today, a few of these boarding schools still exist. Some have been converted into student residences where students reside while attending provincial public schools or separate schools.

What was the effect of this type of education on Indian children? These schools removed the child from his parents and from his community. Generations of Indian children were denied a normal family childhood. They were denied the association with family, with their extended family's perceptions of spiritualism, of acceptable behaviour and of the means for survival. For many, boarding schools meant the loss of their Native language and therefore the loss of their culture. Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. Boarding schools left a wide swath of social problems. The effect was one of cultural conflict, alienation, poor self-concept and lack of preparation for independence, for jobs and for life in general.

Much of what was learned and experienced in boarding schools was a direct contradiction to the philosophy of traditional Indian education. The result was a weakening of the Indian society as a whole.

Integration - Education Provided by Provincial Governments

"To civilize and Christianize" gave way in the 50's and 60's to a policy of integration. Integration is the process of having Indian children attend schools

with non-Indian children, usually in provincially owned and operated schools. Since the policy of integration was introduced in 1948, the government of Canada has succeeded in making provision for approximately 60% of Indian students in "integrated" schools. This program was introduced with little or no consultation with Indian parents and children or the non-Indian community. No particular preparation of teachers or of curriculum was made to accommodate the children of another culture. Today, there is evidence to show that "integration" has not provided the answer to a meaningful education for Indian children.

Chief Dan George in his soliloquy "A Talk to Teachers" makes this comment on integration:

> "You talk big words of Integration in the schools. Does it really exist? Can we talk of integration until there is social integration ... unless there is integration of hearts and minds you have only a physical presence... and the walls are as high as the mountain range."

Integration has been in many schools "only a physical presence." This program has not been one of integration where the different cultures are recognized rather it has been a program of assimilation where Indians are being blended into the non-Indian society.

What has been the effect of this type of education? There has been no notable improvement in the overall achievement of Indian children in integrated schools. Studies on the effects of integration have shown that Indian children reveal patterns that can be identified as alienation and identity conflict. The Indian is caught between two cultures and is therefore, literally outside of, and between both.

In reviewing 300 years of education (schooling) for Indians, what is the "track" record?

1. The dropout rate before high school completion is over 90%.
2. Indian children generally do not read as well as non-Indians.
3. Many Indian children are behind their non-Indian peers in age-level placement
4. Parents feel alienated by the school
5. Teachers feel alienated by the community

What do (did) these systems of education have in common? There was the historic absence of parents - of community, in the process. The vital link of communication has been absent from the process.

Indian Control of Indian Education

It was not until the 1960's that the emergence of Indian leadership began to really be felt in Canada. Leaders began to articulate their concerns for the deplorable conditions of their people. The startling facts surrounding Indian education led to the Indian statement of education policy entitled "Indian Control of Indian Education". Presented to the government in 1972, it was subsquently adopted in principle by DIAND. This national policy is a collection of all the statements of Indian organizations covering all areas of concern in Indian education. It had its origin in the concern of parents for the academic failures of their children in federal and provincial schools over the past several years.

The policy is based on two education principles recognized in Canadian society: parental responsibility, and local control of education. The idea of parental

responsibility means Indian input and Indian influence on the education process. Indian people are best equipped to develop a suitable philosophy of education based on Indian values adapted to modern living.

This policy recognizes the need to improve educational opportunities for Indians. The policy states:

"Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity with confidence in their personal worth and ability. We believe in education...

... as a preparation for total living.

... as a means of free choice of where to live and work.

... as a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political and educational advancement.

Indian philosophy of education is in many ways a more valid and universal one than the one which prevails in educational circles today. Instead of a one-sided view of history, we want our children to learn a Canadian history which attaches honour to the customs, values, accomplishments and contributions of this country's original inhabitants and first citizens, the Indian Canadians of Canada.

We want our children to learn science and technology so that they can promote the harmony of man with nature... not destroy it.

We want our children to learn about their fellow men in literature and social studies, and in the process to learn to respect the values and culture of others.

An Indian philosophy of education looks at learning and teaching as an integral part of living, both for the teacher and the child. It is not a five hour, five day a week exercise for a dozen or so years. It is a life-long commitment.

Indian Control of Indian Education deals with four broad issues: responsibility, school programs, teachers, and school facilities. When it was presented to the Minister in December, 1972, it was meant to be an answer to that question which Department officials ask, sometimes in desperation, sometimes in ridicule: "Well what do Indian people want?"

Responsibility

Under the terms of the treaties, the Federal Government has the obligation to provide funds for the education of Indian people. This is an incontestable fact. In no way does the principle of "Indian control" or "local control" contradict or nullify this fundamental federal obligation. Control of these funds, or more precisely, the power to make decisions on how they will be spent, has been exercised almost exclusively by the Department of Indian Affairs by public-service staff far removed from Indian life or Indian thinking. We have evidence of the disastrous results of this practice.

While we assert that the Federal Government has the legal responsibility for Indian education as set down by the treaties and the Indian Act, we strongly maintain that only Indian people can develop a suitable philosophy of education based on Indian values adapted to modern living. We do not accept that the Government's financial responsibility justifies its dominance over our lives. Our policy demands the right of Indian parents to participation and

partnership with the Federal Government in the education of our children.

Programs

The curriculum must be so structured to utilize the child's awareness of his immediate environment (culture) and to use this as a springboard to learn about the outside world. Curriculum must be integrated throughout the total program with the teacher utilizing every opportunity to relate the subject to the child. Discrete subjects have been introduced into many schools. This is a good beginning but it must not lead to "now you're Indian - now you're not!" There must be community involvement in curricular content. No innovations in curriculum, teaching methods of pupil-teacher relationships can strike deep or permanent roots unless parents are convinced of their value.

Teachers and Counsellors

The policy paper emphasizes that the Federal Government must take the initative in providing opportunities for Indian people to train as teachers and counsellors. Efforts in this direction require experimentation and flexible structures, which will allow the Indian person with talent and ambition to take advantage of the opportunity. The response of the Federal Government to this mandate has been financial support of programs carried out by universities or provincial Departments of Education. Because of the importance to the Indian community, these programs should be developed in collaboration with Indian people. As our own professional people emerge, we can look forward to the day when we will be able to conduct our own training programs.

The policy states that Non-Indian teachers and counsellors should be given more training, over and above their regular normal courses, to prepare them for cross-cultural situations, to give them the skills to make the curriculum for Indian children more revelant and meaningful. We are a long way from a teacher-training program that will insure that every teacher going into Indian Education has a specialized training in intercultural education and has a special knowledge of the cultural and linguistic background of the children he will be teaching. Probably less than 10% of the primary grade teachers in the federal and provincial systems have any knowledge of the local Indian language. If any progress is going to be made in improving education opportunity for Indian children, it is basic that we urge the reform of the provincial teacher training programs.

Facilities

Education facilities must be provided which adequately meet the needs of the local population. Substandard school facilities must be replaced and new buildings and equipment provided.

INDIAN CONTROL OF INDIAN EDUCATION in the most practical terms, means Indian input, Indian influence on the educational process. This may be on reserves or it may be in provincial or territorial schools. But it must result in improvement in the quality of education and in the creation of a learning environment which will give Indian children the chance to know their own language, culture and history, and to develop their unique talents to the maximum potential.

INDIAN CONTROL OF INDIAN EDUCATION is a great challenge. To the parents it has given the chance of renewed faith and hope for our children. Indeed, we may very well represent

the last link between the great traditions of our people and the modern life which surrounds us. The wisdom and values of our ancestors have a place in our lives today and in the lives of our children tomorrow. We have each learned our own life experiences. This is what we will give to our children: the best of both cultures and renewed pride in their Indian tradition. We dare not rest until this wisdom is part of the education which our children receive in our schools.

What is the effect of this type of education on Indian children?

The policy is less than ten years old. It is difficult to evaluate its results at the present time. Indications are that positive trends are being noted in the number who re-enter the school system, in attendance, and in the rate of graduation from high school. Parents are more involved with the school. Curriculum concerns are being addressed as is the accommodation of the school year. Indian Control of Indian Education embraces many of the factors found in traditional education.

Across Canada today, there are approximately fifty Indian controlled schools. Many have partial control while others who do not have schools on their reserves are involved in the provincial schools by means of school agreements.

HOW CAN WE BE SURE THAT "INDIAN CONTROL OF INDIAN EDUCATION" IS THE DIRECTION WE SHOULD TAKE?

WE CAN'T BE SURE BUT
WE HAVE NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE
WE HAVE BEEN SUBJECTS OF
EXPERIMENTATION BY OTHERS
FOR MANY YEARS
WE HAVE NEVER BEFORE HAD
THE OPPORTUNITY TO DECIDE
OUR OWN DESTINY.
WE HAVE WITNESSED YEARS
OF FAILURE IN CANADIAN
SCHOOLS
WE CAN NOT ALLOW IT TO GO ON
WE MUST DESIGN A SYSTEM

THAT WILL ENSURE OUR
CHILDREN MAXIMUM SUCCESS.

OUR CHANCES OF SUCCESS ARE GREAT IF WE UNITE OUR EFFORTS, SEEK THE COUNSEL OF OUR ELDERS AND STRIVE FORWARD EVEN IN THE FORCE OF ADVERSITY.

Conclusion

This presentation has attempted to highlight aspects of traditional education provided by Indians, education provided by the missionaries and governments and the latest direction of Indian Control of Indian Education. The latter direction contains many elements found in traditional education. There is a notable contrast in philosophy and principles between these two and missionary / government education of Indians.

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